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SUBJECT: Pakistan: Government Weathers Current Unrest

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

8 September 1986

Pakistan: Government Weathers Current Unrest

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Summary

Prime Minister Junejo and President Zia still have a clear upper hand over Benazir Bhutto and her Pakistan People's Party who are trying to force new elections. Bhutto has failed to win many new converts--the recent violence has been confined mostly to southern Sind Province--and she will probably resort increasingly to violent tactics to fulfill her goals. But we believe Junejo will be able to continue to fend her off through a combination of force and legal action. The Army will not intervene unless unrest becomes a problem in the key province of Punjab. Over time, we expect anti-US rhetoric within the opposition, including the new National People's Party, to increase, especially if Washington is perceived as endorsing a hard-line government approach to opposition agitation. Pakistan's preoccupation with the current unrest will also hinder US efforts to push for greater efforts on aid to Afghan refugees, narcotics control, and improved relations with India.

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The latest unrest was sparked by opposition leader Benazir Bhutto's plan to hold a large opposition rally in Lahore on 14 August, Pakistan's Independence Day. The Sind and Punjab provincial governments responded by banning all political activities in the two provinces, out of fear that the rally would produce an embarrassingly large turnout and touch off anti-government violence. Prime Minister Junejo, who had earlier cancelled a pro-government rally, backed up the provincial government's actions and repeated his rejection of Bhutto's demand for new elections by the end of this year. In the violence that followed between followers of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party and the police and Army, some 30 people died, mainly in historically volatile Sind Province.

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This memorandum was prepared by [] Pakistan/Bangladesh Branch, South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries should be directed to Chief, South Asia Division at []

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[REDACTED]

Low-level violence continues, but it is mostly confined to Sind. The dominant Punjab Province--where 60 percent of the population lives--remains relatively quiet, according to the US Consulate in Lahore. US diplomatic reporting also indicates that at least several thousand opposition activists have been arrested since 13 August, including Bhutto who is in a Karachi jail on a 30-day detention order. [REDACTED]

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The Government Wins This Round

In our view, the civilian government of Prime Minister Junejo has come out ahead of Bhutto and her party in the wake of the violence. The violence has probably further alienated the large share of the electorate that opinion polls report are already hostile to Bhutto's party. Bhutto's challenge probably has also reinforced the Army's suspicion that she is a dangerous radical who will use any means to achieve her goals. Still, Junejo has suffered some damage to his own image because the crackdown on political activity aids opposition charges that his civilian government is merely "martial law under a different guise." [REDACTED]

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The government seems confident. The US Consulate in Karachi reports that while some violence is continuing, the ban on political activities has been lifted for part of Karachi and that Army units in southern Sind have returned to barracks. [REDACTED] government officials were less worried about violent protests because the opposition's response had been "less fierce" than anticipated. [REDACTED]

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President Zia, who was away on the pilgrimage to Mecca during most of the unrest, has publicly stood by Junejo and endorsed the government's actions in a recent press interview. He stressed, however, that the responsibility for the government's response lay with Junejo. [REDACTED]

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Government Planning for the Future

The government is drawing up contingency plans to deal with future opposition agitation. [REDACTED] Islamabad may invoke a constitutional article that would place local Army units under the jurisdiction of the civilian provincial governments if the law-and-order situation in the provinces deteriorates. [REDACTED]

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Junejo reportedly is also trying to compromise with Bhutto. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Bhutto has legally challenged her detention--a court hearing is scheduled for 9 September, according to press reports. [REDACTED]

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At the same time, Islamabad is counting on rivals of Bhutto, such as Ghulam Mustapha Jatoi who was sacked by Bhutto as Sind People's Party Chief last spring, and Mustafa Khar, another People's Party dissident, to divide the opposition movement. Jatoi's frequent criticisms of Bhutto and his recent formation of the National People's Party serves Islamabad's purpose of sowing dissension within the opposition. Although Jatoi has publicly denied rumors that he is Zia's choice as a potential replacement for Prime Minister Junejo, a source of the US Consulate in Lahore says that Jatoi is willing to "cut a deal" with Zia. [REDACTED]

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Benazir and Opposition at Crossroads

Bhutto and her People's Party apparently have failed to win many new converts to her cause, and we believe she must now decide whether to continue her confrontational strategy or to moderate her tactics and concentrate on organizing and developing grass roots support. She will probably be faced with conflicting advice--from moderates who will urge her to return to nonviolent tactics in an effort to win in local elections next year and from radicals pressuring her to adopt a tougher approach. Some rivals within the opposition movement have publicly criticized Bhutto for prematurely forcing a confrontation with the government.

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We believe that, given the government's continuing rejection of her demands for new elections, Bhutto will probably give the go-ahead for more violent tactics. Her ultimate goal is the ouster of Zia and attaining power. In the coming months, we believe she will conclude that her goals can only be accomplished through force.

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In addition to endorsing violent tactics, Bhutto will probably concentrate her efforts on winning popular support in Punjab Province; she knows that her campaign cannot succeed without the province's support, in our view. She has stated publicly her belief that policemen and soldiers--most of the Pakistani Army is made up of Punjabis--would defy orders to fire on fellow Punjabis, prompting senior Army generals to depose Zia and Junejo.

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Outlook

In our view, the most likely scenario for the near term is that Zia and Junejo will fend off Bhutto's challenge and remain in office. The government threat of legal action against Bhutto--such as trying her for sedition or restricting her movements--is unlikely to moderate her campaign, but we believe violence will continue to be confined mainly to Sind Province where it can be contained by police action--backed up, if necessary, by local Army units.

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In our view, the odds are small that Bhutto can arouse the public support in Punjab that would threaten the government. While many Punjabis may sympathize with her goal of new elections, we believe they oppose the sort of violent agitation that is occurring in Sind because they do not want a return to military rule. Islamabad will also take steps--such as directing government funds to constituencies of pro-government legislators--to ensure that it retains its base of political support.

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A crucial test for the Junejo government will come with local elections scheduled for September 1987. Junejo's Pakistan Muslim League must make a good showing in these polls in order to prepare for the 1990 national elections. If the Muslim League does poorly in the local elections, we would expect complaints to be raised within the Muslim League and the military about Junejo's poor leadership and his inability to deal with opposition. Zia may then call for a parliamentary no-confidence vote and appoint another prime minister--perhaps Ghulam Mustapha Jatoi--without resorting to new national elections.

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At the same time, however, lingering violence in Sind and the continuing stand-off between Islamabad and the opposition could erode public confidence in the government. We believe Jatoi's new National People's Party, given time to organize, could capitalize on this public sentiment and have good prospects for the 1987 local elections. []

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Other Scenarios

A less likely scenario would have the government call snap national elections before 1990 in the belief that public antipathy toward the opposition's violent tactics would produce an impressive Muslim League victory. A government victory would probably neutralize Bhutto as a threat to Zia and Junejo for the next several years. We believe, however, that in light of the recent antigovernment agitation, such elections could not be called soon because it would appear as if Junejo and Zia were caving in to Bhutto's demands. Moreover, snap elections would assume a certain daring on the part of the government that would be uncharacteristic of the usually cautious Junejo and Zia. []

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Bhutto and her party might pursue peaceful protests, register with the government, and run in the 1987 local elections in the hope that a strong nationwide showing would shake public confidence in the Muslim League, force Junejo's resignation, and increase popular pressure for early national elections. The Army would be unlikely, in our view, to take action against Bhutto if she follows a legal path. Moderates within her movement have probably urged her to adopt this course. But on balance, we believe Bhutto will reject these tactics because they risk the defection of radical party members and allied leftist parties. []

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An even less likely prospect, in our opinion, is opposition agitation spreading from the Sind into the Punjab Province, with Bhutto successfully calling for labor strikes and defections of Muslim Leaguers to her People's Party. She would then expect the Army to intervene, replace Zia and Junejo, and hold new elections that the People's Party would win. []

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US Embassy reporting suggests that the military is glad to be back in the barracks and would act only if the civilian government proved incapable of dealing with instability that had spread to the Punjab. Under a military rule scenario, the new leaders, made up of senior Army generals, would probably declare their intention to hold new elections, but we believe they would maintain power for a considerable period in the belief that Pakistani politicians are incapable of providing stable government. Zia would probably be forced to resign from both the presidency and the Army because he would be perceived as having failed in his attempt to establish civilian rule. []

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Implications for the United States

Both the government and the opposition will be seeking public US endorsement for their political objectives in coming weeks. Islamabad was stung by US criticism of the government crackdown--the US Ambassador was called in to receive an official Pakistani protest on 21 August. Bhutto, on the other hand, was probably encouraged by the US statement because she wants US support for early elections. In conversations with US officials, she has endeavored to present herself as moderate, reasonable, and desirous of good relations with the United States. []

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Future, high-level endorsements by US officials of Zia's presidency, however, would likely lead Bhutto to believe that the United States has taken sides against her. Concurrently, anti-US sentiment among People's Party radicals would also increase. Bhutto has recently asserted publicly that the United States was involved in the 1977 overthrow of her father, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

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The government's preoccupation with the current unrest will hinder US efforts to persuade Islamabad to expand overt cooperation in support of the Afghan resistance and to take a tougher stand on narcotics, in part because we believe that Islamabad does not want to give Bhutto issues to arouse public support. Islamabad may be more reluctant, for example, to punish poppy-growing farmers for fear of arousing antigovernment protests in the North West Frontier Province as well as in Sind. Zia and Junejo also are certainly leery of heightened domestic unrest providing new opportunities for Soviet and Afghan troublemaking. Continued unrest in Sind is likely to trigger Pakistani charges of Indian meddling, further setting back the improvement in relations with New Delhi that the United States has sought to foster.

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Appendix

Warning Indicators:

While we are skeptical of Bhutto's ability to overthrow Zia and force new elections, there are several key indicators that would accompany a rise in her prospects for coming to power. These indicators are:

- Violent unrest spreads from the Sind to the Punjab Province.
- Opposition rallies attract larger rallies in the Punjab.
- Police and Army troops exhibit reluctance to suppress opposition violence.
- Bhutto successfully calls for labor strikes and bazaar shutdowns in urban areas.
- Members of the provincial and national assemblies defect to the People's Party.
- Islamabad dismisses local governments in troubled provinces and replaces them with direct federal rule.
- Local assemblies in troubled provinces replace the Chief Minister.
- Kabul steps up terrorist campaign in the North West Frontier Province and anti-refugee feeling increases.
- The economic situation deteriorates and unemployment among returning expatriates rises.